Sportsman races leave drivers in various colorful moods

Motor Sports
Ron B. Stapp

It was a colorful night at Saugus Speedway last Saturday.

Dozens of finely painted and polished trucks circled the ⅛-mile oval as part of the track's Trucker's Night festivities.

But the annual event did not provide all the color of the night. That was showcased later, when the color scheme placed stock car drivers John Higgins and Rick Crow on opposite ends of the spectrum.

Higgins was tickled pink. The third-year Sportsman driver had the night of his life. Entering last week's action, the 25-year-old Simi Valley resident was a virtual unknown who could count his top five finishes on one hand.

But that did not show Saturday. The Simi Valley resident started on the pole and held off three-time Saugus Modified Stock champion Kenny Sapper for his first-ever main event victory.

"It was great," said Higgins, a native of Tennessee. "It was such a feeling of accomplishment. This is what we've worked for. The feeling was greater than anything I've ever experienced before. To win at Saugus, and to hold off Kenny Sapper . . . I had to run a perfect race. If I would have sneezed he would have gone past."

The night offered a different shade for Crow — black and blue. The 1989 Street Stock Rookie Of The Year, who is eighth this season, finished his night, and possibly his season, after a brief visit with paramedics.

The 29-year-old Canyon Country resident was knocked unconscious for a moment when broadsided by Richard Smith in the center of the intersection with one lap remaining in the NASCAR Pro-Stock Figure 8 main event.

Crow, who was in fourth place at the time, emerged shaken from the violent collision, but still managed to load his demolished car on his trailer before leaving the track.

He had no choice. He does not have a pit crew.

"I don't even remember getting hit," Crow said "I thought he was going to go behind me. But that's Figure 8."

It is not the first time Crow and Smith have met in a feature race. Ironically, the two drivers were involved in a mishap three weeks ago, costing Crow another top-five finish.

"We were talking and we've decided that our cars are magnetically attached," Crow said.

As a result of the incident, the fourth or fifth intersection collision of his career, Crow missed three days of work this week because of pains caused by the high-speed wreck.

"I got home Saturday about (midnight) and unloaded my car," Crow said. "I was really sore so I sat in the jacuzzi. I stayed there until about four in the morning."

That is about the time that Higgins and family turned in for the night following a wild celebration that started shortly after his inaugural checkered flag.

"We raised some hell in the pits," Higgins said. "We were hoopin' and hollerin' and making all sorts of noise."

The celebration continued even when the family arrived home.

"I think we probably kept the neighbors up," said Higgins, ninth in the points standings. "We usually try and be pretty quiet. But I guess they'll probably look in the paper the next day and understand why."

Both Higgins and Crow had originally planned to compete at Saugus this weekend, but the last week's events have prompted a change.

Crow's reasons are obvious. He figures it will cost at least $1,500 to repair the car.

Higgins' reasons are more strategic. He is planning to race at Mesa Marin Raceway in Bakersfield in an effort to prepare for the season-ending Racing series.

"I really love racing at Saugus, but the way I figure it, I'd have to win the last two races to make a big difference in my position (in the points standings)," Higgins said. "I probably should try, but at this time I feel strongly about going to Mesa Marin."

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Too close for comfort — Only 37 points separate the top three drivers following Saturday's Colorado's Best Chevrolet Dealers 100 NASCAR Southwest Tour race in Dacono, Colo.

Colorado native Rick Carelli tightened the gap between him and points leader Ron Hornaday Jr. with his sixth victory in 12 starts this season.

Carelli picked up 10 points on Hornaday, who finished second in the event, while moving within seven points of second place Doug George.

Hornaday, the 1987 Saugus Speedway Modified champion, took over the lead from polesitter Jon Pacques on the 14th lap and led the ensuing 27 laps before relinquishing his position to Carelli, who led the final 62 laps. Four extra laps were raced following a late caution flag.

The Tour takes two weeks off before resuming its season at Saugus Speedway Sept. 12.

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Too close to call —Canyon High product Mike Kiedrowski is tied for the points lead following the latest American Motorcyclist Association 500cc National Motocross Series event.

The Acton resident and Jeff Stanton of Sherwood, Miss. each took turns winning a moto for the second straight series race, earning equal points for the night.

Kiedrowski and Stanton are 18 points ahead of third-place rider Jeff Ward after the second of five events scheduled this season.

Ron B. Stapp is a freelance writer. His motor sports column appears Fridays.